Masks of Dionysus. Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Faraone

Bremmer, Jan N.

Published in:
History of Religions

DOI:
10.1086/463450

Publication date:
1996

Review
Reviewed Work(s): Masks of Dionysus by Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Faraone
Review by: Jan N. Bremmer
Source: *History of Religions*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Aug., 1996), pp. 73-76
Published by: The University of Chicago Press
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3176480
Accessed: 30-10-2018 11:04 UTC

tus's testimony too uncritically, which they could have avoided by consulting such excellent comments on the *Germania* as R. Much's. As for the contemporary revival of the Odinic cult (Ásatrú), the authors are apparently not aware of its extension, from Iceland, where the periodical *Huginn & Muninn* regularly appears, to the United States, where some splinter groups compete.

Focusing now on some more precise comments, let us mention a few astonishing statements in the Germanic section, in which Tuisto, the androgynous ancestral deity who engendered Mannus, the father of all mankind, is made a "tribal" god, allegedly related to the Gothic Þiudisko and comparable to the Celtic Teutates. Furthermore, one does not see what the anthropogonic myth of the *Edda* (p. 113), which involves Odin and his brothers or associates,[2] has to do with the Tacitean tradition. Instead of comparing the sacred grove of the Semnones with modern Wiccan practices (p. 116), the authors should have thought of the Eddic *Fjöturlund* and the parallels described by Otto Höfler! Was *Wayland* really worshiped as a smith god, as is claimed on page 119? He is definitely not the Germanic counterpart of the Celtic Goibniu. What Tacitus knows about the Aestii (p. 118) is mere hearsay. His statement about their language rests on its perception by outsiders, as the consonantal system of Baltic did not undergo the Germanic consonant shift; however, the palatalization processes affecting Baltic as a *sat m* language also make it quite different from Celtic. As for the boar emblems, they are certainly relevant to the tradition of Freyr and Freyja, but Tacitus is wrong in taking the Aestii for a Germanic people, and archaeology shows no trace of boar emblems in their area. Obviously, the authors have taken Tacitus too literally and failed to use critical judgment.

These critical remarks do not diminish the great value of this volume as a comprehensive survey of the non-Christian element in European folklore and belief systems and their traditions; it gives the general reader a mostly reliable picture of the history of the pagan cults and the complex development of the Christianization process. It offers an interesting synthesis of the vicissitudes of the uprooting of heathen thought and its success and failure; it is therefore a volume anyone probing into Europe's religious past will enjoy reading.

EDGAR POLOMÉ

University of Texas at Austin

[2] See Edgar Polomé, *Essays on Germanic Religion* (Washington, D.C., 1989), pp. 39–54.

Masks of Dionysus. Edited by THOMAS H. CARPENTER and CHRISTOPHER A. FARAONE. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993. Pp. xviii+344. $49.95 (cloth); $17.95 (paper).

No Greek god has appealed so much to the modern imagination as Dionysus, and it was therefore an excellent idea to organize a conference on this divinity at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in 1990. The resulting

volume is well written, carefully edited, and an important contribution to a better understanding of the god.[1]

The book is divided into four sections, the first of which starts with a follow-up by Albert Henrichs (pp. 13–43) of his earlier historiographical survey, "Loss of Self, Suffering, Violence."[2] In Henrich's view, Dionysus is foremost the god of wine but is also the god of the mask, of female votaries, and of the dead. But whereas many contemporaries try to find one common denominator, the Greeks did not. Moreover, the Greeks still recognized the full divinity of the god, whereas modern scholars like to concentrate on "the disrupter of civil order, the animal within us, the suffering hero" (p. 26). After his great popularity as Bacchus during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,[3] the Greek Dionysus became prominent after Nietzsche, although he was more interested in the Dionysian than in Dionysus. Other important interpreters were Walter F. Otto (1874–1958), who defined the god in polarities, and Louis Gernet (1882–1962), who initiated the interpretation of the god as the Other, which has been so successfully elaborated on by his pupil Jean-Pierre Vernant.[4] In the end, like Henrichs, none of these approaches does justice to the immediacy of the Greek encounter with the god.

Michael Jameson on the asexuality of Dionysus (pp. 44–64) should be read with Thomas Carpenter on representations of the beardless Dionysus (pp. 185–206), although the latter mainly focuses on problems of chronology. In fact, the beardless, effeminate Dionysus is a reflection of the initiate in the last stages of his initiation.[5] Apparently, the early Greeks liked to represent the coming of the new, Dionysiac order by the arrival of the novice on the brink of adulthood. It is perhaps this representation of the god as not yet fully adult that explains his asexual behavior, since for the Greeks sexuality and adulthood went together. If Dionysus had been allowed a normal position in the social order, he would have hardly been associated with periods of social disorder.

The first section is concluded with Dirk Obbink on Dionysiac sacrifice (pp. 65–86); Obbink shows that in their views of Greek sacrifice, many scholars generalized from individual Dionysiac practices and were often influenced by Christian sacramental ritual. He then goes on to demonstrate that Athenian explanations tend to stress the benign aspect of the god. For example, Dionysus is "poured out" and then consumed as wine. In this respect Obbink refers to an intriguing description of a Dionysiac festival in a pagan novel by Achilles Ta-

[1] For views of the god after the publication of this volume, see J. Bremmer, *Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 19–22; F. Graf, ed., "Dionysus," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible,* K. van der Toorn et al. (Leiden, 1995), pp. 480–90; J. -M. Paillier, *Bacchus* (Paris, 1995).

[2] Albert Henrichs, "Loss of Self, Suffering, Violence: The Modern View of Dionysus from Nietzche to Girard," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 88 (1984): 369–97.

[3] See J. D. P. Warners and L. Ph. Rank, *Bacchus,* 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1968).

[4] For Gernet and Vernant, see R. de Donato, *Per una antropologia storica del mondo antico* (Florence, 1990), pp. 1–130, 209–23; see also Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Passé et présent,* 2 vols. (Rome, 1995).

[5] As I showed in my article "Dionysos travesti," in *L'Initiation,* ed. A. Moreau (Montpellier, 1992), 1:189–98. See also the fascinating new Macedonian inscriptions in M. Hatzopoulos, *Cultes et rites de passage en Macedoine* (Athens, 1994), pp. 63–85.

tius,[6] who lived in the second half of the second century A.D. In this passage the god took a shepherd "to a vine, plucked a cluster of grapes, and crushed it before him, saying 'This is the water, and this is the fountain'" (p. 85, n. 54). The passage was once taken by the late Morton Smith as a precedent for Jesus' institution of the Eucharist, but the Princeton ancient historian, Glen Bowersock, has recently demonstrated that the passage is only one of several that attest to a Christian influence on pagan fiction.[7]

The next three essays, by Renate Schlesier (pp. 89–114), Richard Seaford (pp. 115–46), and Froma Zeitlin (pp. 147–82), discuss the connection between Dionysus and the theater. Schlesier continues the increasing tendency of critics to find Dionysus in Greek tragedy, but she hardly demonstrates that the use of Bacchic terminology "shows that tragedy is a Dionysiac genre" (p. 101).[8] Seaford analyzes the connection between maenadism and the wedding ritual in a series of subtle observations. He also sees an opposition between Homer and tragedy: the near absence of the polis in Homer implies the absence of the conflict between household and polis, which frequently occurs in tragedy. Although this observation understates the evidence for the polis in the *Iliad,* he is probably right in that the growing power of the Athenian state made the position of the household more precarious. Zeitlin, finally, well discusses the different values of Athens and Thebes (the Athenian "anticity") in Athenian tragedy in regards to its treatment of Dionysus. She concludes that, unlike in plays set in Athens, those set in Thebes usually connect Dionysus with "negative" gods, such as Ares and Aphrodite.

The third section contains articles by Carpenter, François Lissarrague (pp. 207–20), and Larissa Bonfante (pp. 221–35). Lissarrague well discusses images of satyrs on Attic vases. He shows that satyrs are represented as members in a collective who are thirsty, have a great sexual appetite, and are curious and eager to see, but he does not discuss the problem to what extent these aspects reflect (once?) existing rituals. Bonfante investigates to what extent images of the Etruscan Dionysus, Fufluns, agree with or differ from images of the Greek Dionysus. She manages to show an *interpretatio Etrusca,* but she should also have paid attention to the fact that the Etruscans apparently took over the Bacchic cult organization from the Greeks.

The book is concluded with three studies on Dionysus and the mystery cults by Fritz Graf (pp. 239–58), Walter Burkert (pp. 259–75), and Susan Cole (pp. 276–95). Graf investigates the so-called Orphic gold leaves, of which in the past two decades about half a dozen new ones have been found. In addition to a very useful analysis of recent findings and their eschatological message,[9] he

[6] Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon.*

[7] G. Bowersock, *Fiction as History: From Nero to Julian* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1994), pp. 125–26.

[8] She also overlooked the best discussion of the term *bacchos* (F. Graf, *Nordionische Kulte* [Rome, 1985], pp. 285–91).

[9] Graf could not take into account the latest, fourth-century Thessalian gold leaf (see P. Chrysostomou, "He Thessalike thea En(n)odia e Pheraia" [Ph.D. diss., University of Thessaloniki, 1991], pp. 372–98. The text is more accessible in Bremmer, *Greek Religion,* p. 96, n. 26).

shows that they derive from a background of Bacchic mysteries and were often found with women. Burkert surveys the Hellenistic evidence of these mysteries and demonstrates that they underwent deep transformations in the course of the period, especially after the suppression of the Bacchic mysteries by the Roman senate in 186 B.C. Finally, Cole notes that unlike the gold leaves, later funereal texts hardly concern the afterlife. Cole does not explain her striking observation, but it may well be that the Dionysiac cult adapted itself to the general lack of interest in life after death that prevailed in the Roman Empire. The volume is concluded with an excellent bibliography and indexes.

Compared with earlier analyses, this volume shows the progress we have made in recent years and the fruitful exploitation of new areas, such as tragedy and iconography. The volume lacks, though, an analysis of Dionysiac temples, sacrifices, and festivals. Moreover, various authors hardly seem to realize that the prominence of the god in the theater is a relatively late, typically Athenian development, which should be fitted into other Athenian evidence instead of being used as the clue to the god's essence. We are still waiting for a synthesis that prudently uses the literary, archaeological, and epigraphical material. In the end, it may well be that there is no essence of Dionysus and that we have to make use of the Wittgensteinian "family resemblances" to explain the variations in his cult in the whole of the Greek world. Dionysus remains an enigmatic god.

JAN N. BREMMER

Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

Le sacrifice humain en Grèce ancienne. By PIERRE BONNECHÈRE. Kernos Supplement 3. Athènes-Liège: Centre International d'Étude de la Religion Grecque Antique, 1994. Pp. vii+423.

Did the Greeks once practice human sacrifice? Mythical traditions tell us about ritual killings of human beings that were replaced by animal sacrifices at one time or another. Trusting the value of the historical sources of such stories, Theophrastus formulated an evolutionary theory of religion, which claimed human sacrifice generally to be the historical precedent of animal sacrifice.[1] Even modern historians of religion have tended up to now to believe the ancient myths of substitution to be true, as these accord with a widespread prejudice: all origins were regarded as "wild" and without pity; moreover, altruism and respect for the life of fellow men seem to presuppose a mitigation of manners, a certain amount of higher development of civilization.[2]

I am grateful to Kerstin Gierschner for translating the present review.

[1] Theophrastos, *Peri Eusebeias,* trans. Walter Putscher (Leiden, 1964), pp. 172–77.

[2] This is explicitly formulated in F. Schwenn, *Die Menschenopfer bei den Griechen und Römern,* Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten, vol. 15 (Giessen 1915), pp. 115–21.